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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine whether universities award degree credit for remedial courses, and whether certain lower division courses receive upper division credit. Courses under investigation included remedial English (Subject A at Ventura College, California), remedial math (Math X), and traditionally lower division courses in accounting, introductory statistics, COBOL, FORTRAN, and Assembler Language. The catalogs of 13 universities in California, that received 75% of the transfer students from Ventura College, were analyzed in terms of course descriptions and prerequisites. Five of the 13 universities surveyed offered unit credit in remedial English; four awarded credit for Subject A, and three awarded credit in the area of Study Skills, Reading Lab, or Spelling and Vocabulary. Credit for high school or sub-high school math presented the most frequent opportunity for remedial credit: 12 universities offered credit for Algebra II, four for Algebra I, and four for review arithmetic (Math X). At least one traditional lower division data processing course was offered by eight universities for upper division credit--four offered more than one. A freshman could conceivably receive up to 12 units toward a bachelor's degree for remedial work and an entering junior could obtain up to nine upper division units for lower division courses. (DR)

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UNIVERSITY CREDIT FOR REMEDIAL WORK AND UPPER DIVISION CREDIT FOR LOWER DIVISION WORK:

New Kinds of Grade Inflation?

by

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June, 1979

ABSTRACT

A descriptive study was made to determine (1) whether universities were awarding degree credit for remedial course work, and (2) whether certain traditional lower division courses were being awarded upper division credit. The remedial courses of interest were Subject A and Math X. The traditional lower division courses examined included Freshman Accounting, Introductory Statistics, and certain Data Processing offerings.

The reviewer examined the catalogs of thirteen selected universities, which together received some three-fourths of the transfer students from the reviewer's institution.

The reviewer concluded that, by properly selecting a university, a student could receive up to 12 units towards a BA degree for remedial work; or up to 9 units of upper division credit for traditional lower division work.

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UNIVERSITY CREDIT FOR REMEDIAL WORK AND UPPER DIVISION CREDIT FOR LOWER DIVISION WORK: New Kinds of Grade Inflation?

BACKGROUND

Throughout the years of the 1960's and the 1970's, the American public has been increasingly bombarded with reports of the decline of its educational institutions. Chief among the evidences cited as "proof" of that decline has been the oft repeated references to grade escalation and to the decline in reading scores.

To the lay public such references to grade escalation equated to the awarding of unearned higher letter grades [5], and to the promoting of students who had not actually done passing work [1]. To the academicians, the discussion of grade escalation centered upon the decline in SAT scores [4], and upon a rise in the number of university freshmen who were deficient in basic learning skills [3]. But to the world of work, grade escalation took on added dimensions of functional illiteracy [7] and of underemployment [11]. To these six now obvious measures of grade escalation, have now been added some more, and somewhat subtle, evidences.

Among those less obvious evidences are such institutional practices as the upward extension of the grading scale to 4.3, from the traditional 4.0 maximum [12]. In the commercial arena, a less noticable evidence of grade escalation includes such practices as the intentional rewriting of college textbooks to accommodate the ninth-grade reading level of the average university freshman [9]. No wonder that the Chronicle of Higher Education [10] recently reported of an assessment by the International Labor Office in Geneva that university degrees were "fast becoming tickets to nowhere."

To all such concerns there might now be added two other, and yet more subtle, forms of grade escalation: that of university degree credit for remedial work, and that of upper division credit for traditional lower division work.

Remediation in Higher Education

Remedial courses have traditionally been offered on a massive scale in unified districts, evening adult education programs, and in community colleges. However, massive high visibility remedial programs at the universities are of more recent origin. Certainly the universities have traditionally offered the Subject A (remedial English) and the Math X (remedial math), but not for degree credit.

Now the literature is beginning to reflect a widening pattern of awarding unit credit towards an AA degree for remedial course work. Hertz argued for just such a practice in a commentary in the Community College Review [6], and he quoted Patricia Cross as also advocating the practice. That commentary was restricted to the AA degree, and did not specifically argue for the transferability of such credits to the BA degree level.

While remedial unit credit towards the AA degree is now openly practiced and discussed, such is not the case for the universities' BA degree programs. An examination of the Education Index for the 1977 and the 1978 period reveals many entries under: REMEDIAL - Elementary Schools, High Schools, Junior Colleges. There are only from one to three entries under: REMEDIAL - Colleges and Universities, Universities. Even so, the entries which are cited are typified by Dudley's [3] experimental study on the effectiveness of remediation for college freshmen. Such reports typically do not deal with the question of unit credit towards the BA degree.

A Carnegie report [2], titled Missions of the College Curriculum, addresses the question of degree credit for remedial work in a chapter labeled "Basic Skills - Where Does College Begin?" That report states that degree credit for remedial work was available in 39% to 50% of the four-year colleges surveyed. The report labels such practice as "troublesome" and notes that the problem is compounded when the work missed " . . . is normally provided by elementary and secondary schools."

PROCEDURE

The reviewer examined the catalogs of thirteen universities. Altogether those thirteen four-year institutions receive some three-fourths of the transfer students from the reviewer's community college. The catalogs were examined for two specific types of unit credit:

1. BA degree credit for remedial course work in English, mathematics, study skills, spelling, and reading.
2. Upper division credit for courses traditionally offered in lower division; specifically accounting, statistics, COBOL, FORTRAN, and ASSEMBLER LANGUAGE.

For each category, certain criteria were defined in order to identify the sought after courses. Such was necessary due to the wide variance in course descriptions within the various catalogs. The criteria were of three classifications:

1. Prerequisites to the course.
2. Key words used in the course description.
3. Use of the course itself as a prerequisite.

Assumptions

The reviewer assumed that remedial English (Subject A) and remedial Math (Math X) would be generally accepted as being high school courses, or lower, and of a rather standardized content.

The reviewer assumed that the first course in statistics would be generally accepted as being a lower division course; and of a rather standardized content. The same assumption was made about freshman accounting.

As for the courses in data processing, no such assumptions were made. Instead, the reviewer defined the characteristics of such courses and then sought proof in the literature that such courses had in fact been lower division offerings, or lower.

Course Criteria

The following list shows the criteria for judging Data Processing (DP) courses. The criteria in the list agree with the previously stated three classifications.

	prereq	key descriptive words	prereq for
COBOL I	None, or a survey course	Introductory ---------- Elementary ---------- Basic programming -------	COBOL II
COBOL II	COBOL I	Advanced COBOL ---------- File processing --------- Sort/Merge ----------	Systems Analysis
FORTRAN I	H.S. Algebra	First course ---------- Looping ---------- Arrays ----------	FORTRAN II
FORTRAN II	Calculus I FORTRAN I	Advanced ---------- Scientific subroutines -- Numerical methods ------- Subprograms, files, -----	None
ASSEMBLER	Intro. to D.P.	Symbolic ---------- Macro ---------- Relocatable ---------- Relative address --------	Systems or Software

Historical Evidence

Two published documents were used to demonstrate that COBOL, FORTRAN, Computer Concepts, and Assembler Language had traditionally been lower division college offerings, or lower. Those publications were:

1. Business Data Processing: A Teacher's Manual. California State Department of Education. Sacramento, California, 1963.

2. Comments and Curricula Relating to Third Generation Data Processing. Clark, John R. and Theodore Tilton. Orange Coast College, California. In cooperation with the California State Department of Education, 1967.

Each of those reports provided a suggested DP curriculum. In each case the courses in COBOL, FORTRAN, and Assembler Language were shown as lower division offerings for the community colleges.

A search of educational publications of the 1960's also showed that the above DP courses had been taught at the community college level, or below. As an extreme example, two articles were unearthed which presented full DP curricula

at the high school level, including Assembler Language programming. One such case was described in a 1964 issue of the Journal of Business Education, and also in an industry house organ of the times (Burroughs Corporation). Those two publications discussed the DP offerings of the Des Moines High Schools; a curriculum which dated back to 1962. Another article in the May 1968 Business Education World gave similar information about the DP program at Evanston Township (Illinois) High School.

Without doubt, the literature had provided evidence that the DP courses cited had indeed been traditionally offered below the upper division university level.

RESULTS

The following tables present the results of the survey of certain university catalogs. The three tables are divided as to Developmental (Remedial) Studies; Lower Division DP Core Courses; and Lower Division Business Core Courses.

Five of the thirteen universities surveyed offered unit credit in the area of remedial English. Four of those five institutions awarded unit credit for a course that met the standard Subject A requirement. Three of those five four-year schools offered credit for some course in the area of Study Skills, or Reading Lab, or Spelling and Vocabulary.

Credit for high school or sub-high school math presented the most frequent opportunity for remedial credit. Twelve of the thirteen universities offered degree credit for the second course in high school algebra (Algebra II); four of thirteen offered ninth grade algebra (Algebra I) for degree credit; and four universities out of the thirteen offered degree credit for review arithmetic (Math X, or lower).

Eight of thirteen universities surveyed offered at least one traditional lower division DP course for upper division credit. Table II shows that four of those institutions offered more than one such course for upper division credit.

TABLE 1

Step 1: Developmental Studies, Unit Credit

	Institution	Study Skills or Reading Lab	Subject A (not ESL)	Math X Arith-metic	H.S. Algebra I	H.S. Algebra II
1.	U of C, BERKELEY; '77-'78	1 --	English Course A	--	--	Course P, PS
2.	U of C, LOS ANGELES; '77-'78	--	Subject A	--	--	Math 1A
3.	U of C, SANTA BARBARA; '77-'78	--		--	--	Math 1
4.	U of SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA; '77-'78	Pass/NP Engl. 100	Amer. Lang. Ins't.	Pass/NP Math 107x	--	--
5.	CSU-CHICO; '77-'78	--	--	--	--	Math 3
6.	CSU-FRESNO; '77-'78	--	--	--	Math 1	Math 4
7.	CSU-LONG BEACH; '77-'78	Engl. 108	Engl 001	--	--	Math 100
8.	CSU-LOS ANGELES; '77-'78	--	--	--	--	Math 101
9.	CSU-NORTHRIDGE; '77-'78	--	--	--	--	Math 102
10.	CSU-POMONA; '77-'78	--	--	--	Math 1	Math 101
11.	CSU-SAN DIEGO; '77-'78	US 111	US 100	Math 102	--	Math 103
12.	CSU-SAN JOSE; '76-'78	--	--	Math 12	Math 5	Math 7
13.	CSU-SAN LUIS OBISPO; '77-'79	--	--	Math 100	Math 113	Math 114

U of C: University of California
CSU: California State University

TABLE 2

Step 2: Data Processing Core Courses

Institution	COBOL I	COBOL II	Assembler Language	FORTRAN I	FORTRAN II
1. U of C, BERKELEY	CS 103*	--	--	--	CS 101*
2. U of C, LOS ANGELES	(PL/I)* Mgt 113B	--	--	--	--
3. U of C, SANTA BARBARA	Math 165*	--	--	Math 6A-B	--
4. U of SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA	CS 100d	--	CS 2031	CS 100a	--
5. CSU-CHICO	CS 52	--	CS 51A	CS 50	--
6. CSU-FRESNO	QM 64	QM 162*	QM 169*	QM 63	--
7. CSU-LONG BEACH	Math 273	Math 321*	Math 329*	Math 270	Math 323*
8. CSU-LOS ANGELES	Bus 482*	Bus 483*	--	Math 290	Math 390*
9. CSU- NORTHRIDGE	CS 131	--	CS 132	CS 280	--
10. CSU-POMONA	DP 244	--	DP 364*	DP 214	--
11. CSU-SAN DIEGO	Bus 280	Bus 383*	--	--	--
12. CSU-SAN JOSE	--	--	--	Math 44	--
13. CSU-SAN LUIS OBISPO	CS 140	--	CS 222	CS 101	CS 201

*Upper Division

U of C: University of California
CSU: California State University

TABLE 3

Step 2: Business Core Courses

Institution	Acct'g. 1A	Acct'g. 1B	Elem. Bus. Statistics
1. U of C, BERKELEY	Bus 1	--	Stat 2
2. U of C, LOS ANGELES	Mgt 1A	Mgt 1B	Mgt 115*
3. U of C, SANTA BARBARA	Econ 3A	Econ 3B	Econ 5
4. U of SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA			
5. CSU-CHICO	Acct 15	Acct 16	Math 5A
6. CSU-FRESNO		Acct 1B	Math 11
7. CSU-LONG BEACH	Acct 200A	Acct 200B	Math 180
8. CSU-LOS ANGELES	Acct 200A	Acct 200B	Bus 209
9. CSU-NORTHRIDGE	Bus 220A	Bus 220B	
10. CSU-POMONA	Acct 124	Acct 125	Math 107
11. CSU-SAN DIEGO	Bus 210A	Bus 210B	Math 119
12. CSU-SAN JOSE	Acct 20A	Acct 20B	Mkt 90
13. CSU-SAN LUIS OBISPO	Acct 221	Acct 222	

U of C: University of California
CSU: California State University

DISCUSSION

Given a traditional view of the university, one might register surprise, even alarm, at the broad availability of degree credit for remedial work as shown in TABLE 1. However, given the realization that Developmental (i.e., remedial) Studies has become the fastest growing university curriculum [8], then such traditional alarm can be displaced by contemporary reality. The broad expansion of remedial course work at the universities can be further illustrated by the wide variety of departmental names under which such courses are found. Department names extend from the conventional nomenclature of English and mathematics; to the broader references of University Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies; and finally to the more direct terminology of Skills Center, Developmental Studies, Reading Lab, Vocabulary Building, and Spelling. By any name, the area of remedial education is being embraced by universities which once provided no outward evidence of such mass offerings.

Even if remedial work had been offered in the past by universities, degree credit was not awarded. Those who recall taking Bonehead English or Dumbbell Math also recall that such courses did not carry BA degree credit. Persons who were not prepared for college work were thus given time to prepare, but did not receive degree credit for the needed remedial work. As for the movement of traditional freshman courses to the sophomore year, and even into upper division, such may be a natural result of the influx of remedial courses. For if a student does remedial work in the freshman year, then presumably the freshman work would come in the sophomore year. That would leave the junior year for the remainder of the lower division work. Continuing with this logical progression, and given the recent trend towards reduced BA degree requirements of 120 units, and the change to twelve units/semester for a full load, then when would the student encounter a full two years of upper division work?

CONCLUSIONS

The reviewer concluded that for the 13 universities in the study:

1. All offered at least some degree credit for remedial course work.
2. By properly selecting one of these universities, an entering freshman could receive up to 12 units toward a BA degree for remedial work.
3. Half of those universities offered at least one traditional lower division course for upper division credit.
4. By properly selecting one of those universities, an entering junior could obtain up to 9 upper division units for traditional lower division work.
5. The potential exists for competition (in this geographic area) between two-year and four-year schools for remedial students, and for lower division DP students.

Limitations and Significance

The conclusions presented here must be limited to the 13 universities surveyed; and to the geographic area of the community college involved. However, since many other nearby community colleges in Southern California provide students to these same 13 universities, then these findings extend beyond a single institution.

The most significant impact would seem to be reserved for the individual student. Briefly, now, consider the plight of an educable, intelligent, young person who finishes college having taken remedial courses in lower division, and lower division work in upper division. What will be the impact upon that individual when he or she finally arrives at the reality of not having received a college education? Will that person feel cheated? Will that person sue the university as have a few in recent years? And what of the loss to the nation when large numbers of good paying jobs go unfilled, while college graduates remain underemployed?

These data are limited to a survey of catalogs. There are three additional sets of data that would have aided in presenting a more meaningful picture of those shifts in course offerings. The first and most important additional data set would have been a survey of the class schedules for the thirteen institutions in order to determine what percentages of actual offerings were in the remedial areas. Second, it would have been of value to have known whether the students in the various courses were actually entering freshmen, lower division, or upper division students. And finally, a more extensive survey would have been helpful in determining whether other subject areas in the institutions, besides English and math, did provide degree credit for remedial work; or whether subjects other than Data Processing had migrated from lower division into upper division.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Twelve different forms of grade escalation have been cited here. Probably most such forms have been arrived at by a process of reaction and by default rather than through choice or planning. Therefore, the following recommendations are submitted:

1. Individual universities should evaluate various remedial offerings to determine whether or not BA degree credit was explicitly intended.
2. Where university degree credit for remedial work is to be continued, then consideration should be given to the transfer of similar units from the community colleges.
3. Individual universities whould consider the advisability of limiting the number of remedial units which can be applied towards the BA degree requirements.

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